

CHAPTER IV.

The Choroti (4). Food and drink. Household furniture.

Game used for food. Different ways of preparing, serving and eating the food. Preserving food. Salt. Water. Earthenware vessels. Bottles, boxes, dippers and spoons, made out of calabash shell. Wooden food dishes and spoons. Baskets. Large-sized bags of caraguard fibre yarn. Carrying-neis. Men's handbags of caraguard and wood. Cactus spines used as «Knitting needles». Distaffs. Weaving. Bead ropes. Knives, of iron, wood, and cane. Jaws of fishes, used as knives. Mussel-shell scrapers. Wooden saws. Bone awls. Fire-drilling.

262 Whilst on the subject of the hunting methods of the Choroti, I stated that those Indians look upon almost any kind of wild animal as being eatable, and that they even eat such, from a food point-of-view, repulsive animals as foxes, rats, vultures, owls, lizards and snakes. Certain insects, too, e. g., the larvae of a large beetle, and locusts, are used as food. The eating of foxes and vultures is not, however, practised by all Choroti. Nordenskiöld, for instance, says that foxes are by the Choroti considered useless for human food,¹ whilst Karsten numbers the fox among such animals as are eaten.² The latter, however, adds that vultures, owls and foxes are only eaten by elderly people who may be considered versed in the art of laying evil spirits. Therefore in the case of the Choroti, it would seem as, if the question of the edibility of any particular animal were largely dependent upon magical conceptions, so that anyone who is an expert exorcist may safely indulge in the eating of the flesh of any wild animal (see p. 97).

- 252 Meat may be roasted piled on skewers, or broiled on hot embers, or it may be boiled, and smaller animals, such as lizards, snakes and rats, are placed in the ashes that are on top of the glowing coals, without

¹ Nordenskiöld (18), p. 33.

² Karsten (2), p. 38.

[p. 114]

skinning or gutting, and are usually eaten with entrails, excrement and 252
all. When the Choroti eat the entrails of larger animals, they do not
first rinse them out, but are, at best, content with squeezing out the
contents. Nordenskiöld has seen them eating intestinal contents as spinach
together with the meat.¹ Fish is grilled, either by being laid on glowing
embers, or tied between two sticks stuck into the ground by the fireplace.

As servers for food are used bowls of clay, wood, or calabash shell, 415
or merely large, fresh leaves.

In foregoing chapters I have given the names of such
plants, wild as well as cultivated, as are of importance in the
food supply of the Choroti. Vegetables are eaten raw, boiled,
roasted or dried. The Choroti, like other Chaco tribes, eat
the fruits of the algaroba, and other similar fruits, in the
following, rather original way. The raw fruits are put into a
large wooden mortar (fig. 122); and there pounded up. The
pulp is put into a calabash bowl, where it is stirred up with
water, and the dish is then ready for eating. Those who are
about to partake, squat down around the bowl, and each
individual helps himself with his bare hand to the pulpy mass,
which he puts into his mouth, chews and sucks, whereupon
he spits his mouthful of mush back
into the bowl. Another mouthful
is taken, and in due course spat
out, and so on. This is repeated
by all the participants of the meal
until all the sweet and nutritious
components of the mess have been
used up. What a bowl of "fruit
cheese" is like, after half-a-dozen
Indians have been eating and
spitting for a while, the reader
may possibly picture to himself,
by the aid of his imagination.

In another work of mine I have
said that the Choroti eat the *fruits*

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Fig. 122. Mortar and pestle of hard wood, the latter 114
consisting of palo santo. Choroti, Gran Chaco, Bolivia. 262
¹/c. *Riksm.* 03. 3. 133 and 03. 3. 137.

¹ Nordenskiöld (18), p. 53.

25. v. Rosen, II.

114 of the chaguar (chahuar).¹ This statement, which is erroneous, is due to
 262 the similarity of sound existing between chaguar² and chañar.³ The *fruits*
 of the latter are eaten by the Indians, whilst of the former only the
 rootstock is edible.

251 By drying, the Choroti preserve vegetables against seasons of shortened
 food supply.

263 Personally I have not seen the Choroti use salt, but, nevertheless, they
 possess this condiment. Possibly they, like the Lengua, extract salt from
 the ash of a plant growing on the Chaco.⁴ Salt-making from vegetable
 ash is known to many primitive peoples.⁵

264 Among the Choroti I never saw men and women eating together.

[462] The preparing of food is, as a rule, the work of the women. The
 515 Choroti are not dainty about their food, and the uncleanness which is
 252 a distinguishing trait in culinary matters among these Indians surpasses
 almost anything I have ever observed among other primitive peoples,
 with the exception of the Mataco Indians. Of the latter, however, my
 experience is limited to only a few families, and it may be unfair to judge
 the whole tribes from those.

271 Water, often muddy, ordinarily forms the drink of the Choroti. When
 in the dry season the Indians are on the move, or from some reason or
 other find themselves far away from any river, they sometimes suffer very
 badly from lack of water.

273 In the season for harvesting wild fruits, such as algaroba, tusca, and
 chañar, an intoxicating fruit beer is brewed. During the time of year that
 I visited the Choroti, there were no fruits of which any intoxicating
 beverage could be brewed; consequently I never had an opportunity of
 observing either the brewing of beer, or any drinking carousal. This led
 me to suppose that the art of brewing fermented liquor was unknown to
 the Choroti. Nowadays the Choroti have learnt from the Chiriguano also
 how to brew maize beer. Of the Choroti method of beer-brewing, Norden-
 skiöld has given the following description:

•When tusca beer is to be made, the fruit is first of all ground, and
 they water added, the whole being thereupon left in a dirty animal hide.

¹ von Rosen (3), p. 9.

² *Bromelia serris*.

³ *Gourliea decurtilans*.

⁴ Hawtrey (1), p. 287.

⁵ For one method of producing salt from plants, see von Rosen (4), p. 240.

XIII.

Fire-places and Accessories.

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The fire-places of the Indian tribes here dealt with consist of a few branches laid on the ground, pointing to the same centre, over which the food is roasted or cooked.

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The *babracot* is unknown in the Chaco, as it is in the Andes, in Patagonia and in Tierra del Fuego. In the Chaco the *Wooden spit* is used exclusively. It is sometimes furcated. (Fig. 17)¹⁾. Of the Indian tribes visited by me the following exclusively used the spit (Map 7): (2) Ashluslay, (10) Aymara, (5) Chané (4) Chiriguano (1), Choroti, (6) Mataco (18) Quichua (3) Tapiete (7) Toba. The Mestizos in the Argentine also use the spit exclusively.

The following tribes which I have visited are acquainted with the *babracot* Atsahuena, Cavina, Chacobo, Chama, Chimane, Guarayú (Mission); Guarayú (Pauserna), Huanyam, Huari, Tambopata-Guarayó, Yambaca, Yuracaré.

The *babracot* and probably also the spit, are to be found among most of the tribes in Brazil, Guayana, Venezuela, and Columbia. The Ashluslay, spit, but not the *babracot*, are stated to be used, in addition, by the (44) Charrua²⁾ (97)

Fig. 17. Wooden spit.
Ashluslay.
G. M. (C. 497)

¹⁾ See also *Indianerleben*, pl. 10.

²⁾ ARAUJO, p. 121.

XIV.

Utensils used in preparing and consuming Food¹a). *Utensils for preparing flour.*

The Chaco Indians here dealt with understand how to prepare flour, as most of the Indians do. For this purpose they use small wooden mortars with pestles of the same material. Occasionally the Ashluslay quite simply use a pit in the ground as a mortar.

Two ways of grinding corn may be said to exist in S. America, in one the corn being crushed in a mortar, while in the other it is ground between stones or between a stone and a wooden block. The distribution of the two methods may be seen from the following table.

No. on the
map.

Tribes which use wooden mortars.

(See Map 10).

- 61, 48. Tribes on the R. Negro, R. Yapura and R. Iça, KOCH-GRÜNBERG (2); WHIFFEN¹), p. 141.
- 64. Huari.
- 40. Guarayú, Guarayos.
- 28. Bakairí, STEINEN (3), p. 363.
- 90. Chipaya, SNETHILAGE, p. 94.
- 15. Kayapó, KRAUSE, p. 388.
- 13. Karajá, KRAUSE, p. 254.
- 50. Savajé, KRAUSE, p. 358.
- 4. Chiriguano.
- 21. Caingúa, OUTES Y BRUCH (5) p. 95.
- 3. Tapiete.

¹) According to WHIFFEN the mortar is only used for pulverizing coca leaves.

000 wilth stones in wooden troughs, or on wooden blocks, or with wooden blocks in wooden troughs.

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252 Both the Choroti and the Ashluslay sift the corn through a net, and not therefore through a sieve specially made for the purpose. Of the tribes I got to know on my travels, the Toba, Mataco and Tapiete generally employ this method. All the others¹⁾ used baskets. The latter include the Chiriguano and Chané.

Pockets are also used for sifting. Honey is strained by the Ashluslay through a specially prepared straining cloth of Caraguatá.

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412 As I have mentioned, the Ashluslay cultivate manioc. So do the Choroti, and probably some of the Mataco Indians. The cultivation of manioc must have reached the Chaco from the north or east. The boards used for rubbing the manioc root, are usual among the Ashluslay and Choroti Indians. These boards, which consist of a piece of palmwood into which numerous splinters of wood have been driven, clearly belong to the cultural elements that the Chaco Indians obtained from the north or east. Among a few tribes in N.E. Bolivia a prickly root of a palm is simply used as a grater, these natural graters probably representing the original type. In some districts sharp splinters of stone, instead of wooden splinters, are driven into the grating board.

000 I. The following tribes use a prickly root of a palm as a grater: (62) Chacobo, (22) Yuracaré, (63) Yamiaca and (X) Yurúna.²⁾

¹⁾ With the possible exception of the Huari.

²⁾ KLETTE, p. 683.



Fig. 19. Manioc-Grater, Ashluslay. G. M. (A. 1662) 1/3.

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II. The following tribes use a board into which wooden splinters have been driven:

- (2) Ashluslay (Fig. 19), (1) Choroti, (28) Bakañri¹⁾ and Suyá^{1b)}, (XI) Yamamadi²⁾, (13) Karajá³⁾, (61) Boro, Uitoto, and other tribes between the R. Putumayo and the R. Yapurá⁴⁾ (IX) Colorados⁵⁾ and (5C) Nambiquara.⁶⁾

III. The following tribes use a board with stone splinters driven into it: (38) Tupinambá⁷⁾, (74) Sáliva and other tribes on the R. Orinoco⁸⁾, (47) Patamona, Macusi, Arecuna and other tribes in Guayana⁹⁾, (48) Siusi and other tribes in N.W. Brazil.¹⁰⁾, (V2) Indians on the R. Guainia¹¹⁾, (V5) Makiritare¹²⁾, (55) Kalina¹³⁾, (31) Trio¹⁴⁾ (V5) Yekuaná and Guinaú on the upper R. Ventuari and R. Merewari.¹⁵⁾

IV. Without specification of the material: (20) Paresi-Kabiñi¹⁶⁾ and (V3) Caripou at Yapoco¹⁷⁾.

The (59) Chirichana¹⁸⁾ have grating-boards with teeth instead of stones. The Waika¹⁹⁾ use rough slabs of granite

¹⁾ V. D. STRIKEN (2) p. 121.

^{1b)} do. p. 206. Not marked on the map.

²⁾ Rio Purus, BERNHARDT (2) p. 55 + Palm wood spikes.

³⁾ KRAUSE p. 231. Spikes of Prejauva wood.

⁴⁾ WHIFFEN, p. 141. Palm spikes.

⁵⁾ RIVET (3), p. 191.

⁶⁾ ROQUETTE-PINTO (2), p. 183.

⁷⁾ LÉRY, p. 110. THÉRET, p. 302.

⁸⁾ CHILJ, Vol. 2, p. 304. fig.

⁹⁾ IM THURN, p. 200, Museum Material G. M. etc.

¹⁰⁾ KOCH-GRENNBERG (2) Vol. 1, p. 77 seq. Vol. 2, p. 205.

¹¹⁾ ERNST, p. 527.

¹²⁾ ERNST p. 528, KRICKENBERG, p. 89, fig. 6.

¹³⁾ TEN KATE, p. 3.

¹⁴⁾ GÖRJE (2) p. 5.

¹⁵⁾ KOCH-GRENNBERG (communicated by letter).

¹⁶⁾ MAX SCHMIDT (4) p. 200.

¹⁷⁾ «rapent sur une pierre ou sur un bois falet en façon de limes. MOCQUET, p. 83. «Ce pays d'Yapoco est à plus de 120 lieues du pays des Toupinambous. MOCQUET, p. 89.

¹⁸⁾ BARBOSA RODRIGUES p. 131.

¹⁹⁾ KOCH-GRENNBERG (4), p. 200.

as graters. On the coast of Ecuador (J) they have found grating-boards (?) of baked clay with stones fastened in the clay¹⁾.

It is of great interest to see that in N.E. Bolivia we only find the most primitive form of manioc grating-boards.

b) *Cooking utensils.*

The Ashluslay and the Choroti cook their food in simple pots of baked clay. Of the tribes I have visited in my travels, the Cháma and Tambopata-Guarayo Indians are the only ones that have no clay vessels. For the rest, very few S. American tribes have no cooking utensils of baked clay. They are the Botoécudo and some other Gê tribes, the tribes of Tierra del Fuego, and now also the Patagonians.

c) *Wooden spits.*

(See Chapter XIII).

d) *Platter, etc.*

The (1) Choroti and (2) Ashluslay eat off dishes of baked clay, or off calabash shells. The former, and probably also the latter, have wooden platters as well. The Ashluslay also have large wooden basins.

I have seen wooden bowl (Map 12) among the following tribes in addition to those named: (19) Aymara, (18) Quichua, (5) Chané (4) Chiriguano (6) Mataco, (22) Yuracaré, (23) Churápa and (89) among Indians on the Calilegua, Argentina.

They are also known from the (18) Quichua, Papa-lacta in Ecuador²⁾ (10) Araucanians,³⁾ (16) Guató⁴⁾ (49) Araona⁵⁾ (36) Ijea⁶⁾ and the (68) Omagua (?)⁷⁾.

¹⁾ JOYCE, Pl. 6. fig. 2.

²⁾ UHLER (1) Vol. 2. Pl. 17. fig. 18--19.

³⁾ LATCHAM (1) p. 342.

⁴⁾ MAX SCHMIDT (3) p. 211.

⁵⁾ ARMENTIA p. 60.

⁶⁾ BOLINDER (4) p. 59.

⁷⁾ M. f. V. L. (S. Am. 1339).

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sible. I may add here that the Choroti men are in the habit of wearing round their neck a kind of flat whistle made of wood and ornamented with incised figures. With these whistles they produce shrill sounds from time to time during the dances, which are supposed to imitate the sounds of the spirits and have the power of frightening them away.

How the Indians believe themselves to be able to influence even natural processes by imitating them, appears in an interesting way from the following curious ceremony which I witnessed among the Choroti. These Indians cultivate the maize only on a very limited scale, and it is among them a rare cereal. In a village the women had obtained some maize and were cooking it on the open place outside the huts. While the maize pots were boiling, the women sang in a loud, quavering, guttural voice, which it is impossible to describe exactly, an extremely monotonous chant, which was evidently meant to imitate the monotonous sound and the regular, bubbling movements of the water boiling in the pot. The women explained to me that *in this way the pot would boil well and the maize soon become soft*. The chanting was thus a means of hurrying on a natural process according to the same magical principles as we have noticed in several other cases.